CHAPTER IX

THE CH'ING (MANCHU) DYNASTY: ITS HEYDAY AND THE BEGINNING OF ITS DECLINE (A.D. 1644-1838)

INTRODUCTORY

THE Ta Ch'ing dynasty—usually called simply the Ch'ing fas a rule translated "pure" or "unsullied[1]")—which the Manchus established was to be one of the longest-lived in the history of China. During the nearly three centuries of its rule (1644-1912) the Chinese experienced some of the most remarkable developments of their entire career. Under the Ch'ing the Empire reached its greatest territorial extent—not counting the Yuan period, for China was then only the chief unit of the Mongol domains. At its height the dynasty ruled over China proper, Manchuria, Mongolia, Sinkiang, and Tibet, and received tribute—in recognition of a more or less shadowy suzerainty—from Nepal, Burma, Laos, Siana, Annarn, the Liu Ch'iu Islands, and Korea. Under the Ch'ing, too, the Chinese were more numerous than at any previous time. Moreover, during the heyday of the dynasty China attained a fresh level of material prosperity, probably higher than ever before. In the latter part of the seventeenth and through most of the eighteenth century, indeed, it was the most populous and possibly the most prosperous realm on the planet. In numbers of people it outstripped all the other great contemporary empires—the British, the Spanish, the French, the Russian, the Ottoman, and the Mogul. From the standpoint of

order and justice it was probably as far advanced as any state of the time, for that was before the humanitarian movement had ameliorated the laws, the courts, and the prisons of the West. In total wealth, too, it very possibly surpassed every other nation of the period.

During these years, to be sure, culture underwent no especially great changes: the country was content to shape its life